

Meeting Date: November 14-15, 2007

Agenda Item No. 7

Agenda Item: Bonneville Cutthroat Plan

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Scott A. Grunder, Fishery Program Coordinator, Fisheries Bureau

Background: Due to a variety of factors, Bonneville cutthroat trout have declined in abundance across their historical range in the western United States. In Idaho, Bonneville cutthroat trout occupy 63% of their historical range, all within the Bear River drainage. The Fisheries Bureau and the U.S. Forest Service (Caribou-Targhee National Forest) have cooperated in developing a Management Plan for Conservation of Bonneville Cutthroat Trout in Idaho. Since the Forest Service administers a significant percentage of important habitat for this subspecies, it is advantageous to have a joint management plan. This plan summarizes historical and current information on Bonneville cutthroat trout in Idaho, and it describes their status with respect to abundance, trends, genetics, and an evaluation of land and water management effects on the subspecies. We present joint management strategies and conservation actions to increase the persistence of Bonneville cutthroat trout in the Bear River drainage. The Commission previously was notified of the Department's intent to solicit public comment on a Draft Plan. This presentation will provide an overview of the agency and public comments received on the management plan and the Department's disposition of those comments. The Fisheries Bureau seeks Commission approval of the Bonneville cutthroat trout management plan.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues: The Management Plan for the Conservation of Bonneville Cutthroat Trout in Idaho describes how the Department intends to manage and conserve this important game fish as per its mission found in Idaho Code Section 36-103. The Department's strategic plan has a goal to "Improve public understanding of and involvement in fish and wildlife management." This plan sets management direction and goals for conservation of Bonneville cutthroat trout. The Commission sets policy and provides direction, considers input from the public, and has the authority to adopt, amend, or reject Department-recommended plans. The Fisheries Bureau solicited public and agency comments on the management plan. Having done that and incorporating comments as appropriate, the Fisheries Bureau is seeking Commission adoption of the Bonneville cutthroat trout management plan.

Public Involvement Process: The Department posted the Bonneville cutthroat trout management plan on its website and issued a news release notifying the public and agency partners that the management plan was ready for review. The Southeast Region, Forest Service, and Mr. Grunder made personal contacts soliciting comment on the plan. We accepted comments on the plan for a 30-day period from mid-September through mid-October 2007.

Staff Recommendation: The Fisheries Bureau is seeking Commission action to adopt the Management Plan for Conservation of Bonneville Cutthroat Trout in Idaho as an official Department species management plan.

Justification: Fisheries Bureau staff and the U.S. Forest Service have been working on this management plan for two years. There have been attempts by organized groups to petition the federal government to list Bonneville cutthroat trout under the Endangered Species Act. We believe this management plan offers the best available scientific information and necessary conservation actions that will allow the Department and Forest Service to effectively manage, conserve, and protect this subspecies and its habitats in Idaho.